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SUBJECT: WHA AREA DIPLOMATS IN HAVANA EXPRESS THOUGHTS ON
SUMMIT THEMES AND US-CUBA RELATIONS

Classified By: COM: Jonathan Farrar for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) On march 4, DCM hosted a lunch of colleagues from several western hemisphere embassies in Havana including Mexico, Brazil, Peru, Colombia, Chile, Argentina, the Bahamas and Trinidad and Tobago. Pol/Econ chief and ConGen also participated.

¶2. (C) Though the just-announced cabinet changes in the Cuban government (Septels) were of great interest to all (and none had any more information than we have), the group was also very interested in knowing what, if any, gestures the Obama administration would be making toward Cuba. DCM stressed that there have been no USG policy initiatives regarding Cuba to date. In the discussion that followed, CG asked what the diplomats believed the USG might see in return from the GOC if it were to announce any initiatives. The unanimous response is that we should not expect any response from the Cuba government. CG then asked how many actions they thought the USG could take before there would be some reaction from the Cuban government. Led by the Brazilian DCM, the others argued that the U.S. should not count on anything in return at any point. Cuba believes itself to be the aggrieved party in the relationship, and therefore believes that it is up to the U.S. to make, not just the first move, but all of the moves. From the body language and additional comments as others chimed in it appeared that our colleagues believed the Cuban position to be a fair one. None of those present (though Brazil would have been the only logical possibility) said that their leaders would be willing to approach the GOC on behalf of the U.S.

¶3. (C) The discussion shifted to preparations for the Summit of the Americas in April. The guests believed that it will be important that the USG make some gesture toward Cuba before the summit gets underway. They anticipated that the issue of U.S. relations with Cuba will be viewed closely in the context of the agenda of the summit, and relations between the US and the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean. P/E chief commented that, while we have an overall vision for policy in the hemisphere, US relations are not with the region as a whole, but with each individual country. Our policies, including those regarding Cuba, are driven by the particular bilateral interests we have with each in the context of those overall goals. The Brazilian, Argentine, Peruvian, and Chilean DCMs all said that each of their governments views its relationship with the U.S. in exactly the same way. They cautioned, however, that several other countries (e.g. Venezuela, Bolivia, Paraguay, Nicaragua) were more disposed to try to force a discussion on U.S. relations with Cuba as a precondition for discussing any other issue that might be a priority for the U.S. They added specifically that it was possible that Honduras will press

for a decision to readmit Cuba to the OAS in advance of the OASGA in June.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: Though our diplomatic colleagues are seldom completely frank with us about their relations with the GOC, it has been apparent for some time that the GOC has been working all of the governments in the region very hard to get broad support to advance its bilateral agenda with us.

Ironically, now-fired Communist Party foreign policy chief Fernando Remirez de Estenoz was thought to be the principal architect of the Latin American and Caribbean policy that included this effort, and which led to such successes as Cuba's admission to the Rio Group.

FARRAR